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Reform of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report has been prepared in response to the requests of the General Assembly contained in its resolution 57/283 B and also as a follow-up to the report of the Secretary-General on improving the performance of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services (A/57/289). As such, it sums up the measures taken by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management in the first year of reform and outlines the future course of action.

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I. Introduction

A. The new philosophy of reform

1. The management of conferences and meetings and the processing of documents constitute "a central and fundamental aspect of how the world's most inclusive multilateral institution conducts its business" (see A/57/387, para. 100). In furtherance of the reform efforts initiated in 1997 that integrated technical secretariat support with conference services, the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management aims to "play a more proactive role in enhancing the effectiveness of the total process of intergovernmental activity" (see A/57/387, para. 102). Since the second half of 2002, in a major departure from the previous demand-driven approach, it has instituted proactive managerial policies and working methods and pursued full-system benefits in order to implement the reform measures contained in the report of the Secretary-General on improving the performance of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services (A/57/289).

B. The implementation plan

2. This new philosophy finds full expression in a meticulously designed implementation plan that stresses the synergies of its components and seeks to optimize both technical secretariat support and meetings and documents management through sustained, concerted and integrated programme execution. With the support of the Management Consulting Section of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), an implementation team composed of representatives of all subprogrammes reviewed the operational activities of the Department and examined the interaction of various reform measures. A series of Departmental town hall meetings as well as workshops with the individual work units most affected by the reform were held to solicit feedback. As finally adopted by the Departmental Management Group on 7 November 2002, the comprehensive plan identifies key steps, dependencies, time frames and managerial responsibilities for each and every action proposed. Currently several months into the implementation phase, the newly introduced managerial and operational changes are already yielding tangible benefits, as analysed below. To implement reform without affecting its support for the intergovernmental process, the Department has taken extra care to preserve order amidst change and to promote change in an orderly way.

II. Repositioning the Department

3. To address the constraints stemming from the servicing nature of its operations and the limitations of a demand-driven reactive approach, the Department has assumed a distinctly proactive stance by putting in place a new modus operandi within the Department, as well as in relation to the other Secretariat entities and intergovernmental bodies.

A. Technical secretariat support

1. General Assembly

4. Drawing on its experience with the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly and taking advantage of the early election of the President of the fifty-eighth session, the Department has initiated a sound working relationship with the President-elect, in particular with regard to the planning of activities of the Assembly. A draft programme of work for the plenary of the fifty-eighth session was prepared well in advance of the opening of the session, in consultation with the President-elect, and was communicated to all permanent missions and the relevant departments of the Secretariat. Although still tentative, the early availability of the draft programme of work is expected to set the stage for the smooth and effective conduct of the work of the Assembly, and is critical to the success of the slotting system for the submission of documents and the improvement of meeting scheduling. Another measure that is expected to facilitate the work of the plenary of the fifty-eighth session and enhance the utilization of conference resources is that the programme of work has been organized around the main themes of the United Nations Millennium Declaration (General Assembly resolution 55/2) by clustering agenda items on related subjects and holding joint debates.

2. Main Committees

5. In a similar way, the Secretaries of the Main Committees have been more proactive in their working relationship with the Chairpersons and Bureaux of the intergovernmental bodies that they service. Their work focuses on the early preparation and rationalization of the programmes of work of the Committees and various subsidiary bodies with a view to better planning their activities in advance, synchronizing their work schedules with the issuance dates of mandated documents and ensuring the full utilization of allocated conference resources. As required, they also facilitate consultations among delegations on substantive issues related to the work of the Committees.

6. In addition to advance planning, the Department has made an effort to reduce documentation. It has worked on ways to consolidate reports in consultation with author departments and prepared the submission schedule for the pre-session documents of the fifty-eighth session of the Assembly on that basis.

B. Conference management

7. In the area of meetings management, the administrative decision contained in information circular ST/IC/2002/13 of 28 February 2002 to restrict the holding of night and weekend meetings was reaffirmed as a policy in the report of the Secretary-General on improving the performance of the Department (A/57/289). Its successful implementation, with the emphasis on strict adherence to the calendar of conferences and meetings, has made possible better programming and more cost-effective delivery of services by the Department, especially interpretation services. It has also enabled intergovernmental bodies to conduct their work with greater efficacy within the resources allocated, without unduly affecting their smooth functioning. The plenary meetings of the General Assembly, the Security Council and the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council are not under

restriction. The requests by other intergovernmental bodies for additional meeting time that are submitted to the Committee on Conferences are granted when warranted. Last but not least, the policy has had a positive effect on the work schedules and personal life of delegates and Secretariat staff alike, who had year after year suffered from unpredictable and tiresome work processes.

8. In the area of documents management, the slotting system, which was introduced in January 2003 to regulate the submission of documents for processing by the Department, has led to an initial improvement in the timeliness of submission of documents by author entities, and more significantly to enhanced awareness on the part of author departments of the need for timely submission. That critical achievement in advance planning has in its turn improved the punctual issuance of documents in time for their consideration by intergovernmental bodies. Meanwhile, with the personal intervention of the Secretary-General and the support of the heads of departments and offices concerned, the Department has made noticeable gains in strictly implementing the limitation of the length of reports originating in the Secretariat.

III. Pursuing full-system benefits

9. As elaborated in the report of the Secretary-General on improving the performance of the Department (A/57/289), another major aspect of the new philosophy of the Department is to endeavour "full-system benefits" by instilling a new managerial culture that focuses on the overall performance of the Department and synergy within and across work units. The strategy is to optimize and integrate work processes within the Department, both upstream and downstream, and to programme and provide services in close collaboration with the intergovernmental bodies concerned. With the support of the implementation plan and the setting up of relevant mechanisms, efforts have been made at three levels — intradepartmental, interdepartmental and intergovernmental.

A. Mechanisms

10. The Department has put in place well-structured mechanisms to ensure the effective and sustainable implementation of interconnected reform measures. The Departmental Management Group, chaired by the Head of the Department and composed of its senior management, meets weekly to discuss, coordinate and make decisions on the policies and important operational issues of the Department. In particular, it conducts a monthly review of the progress of reform in the light of the implementation plan and makes adjustments, as required.

11. The Departmental Management Group has established two subsidiary bodies, consisting of representatives of all units, to operationalize the decisions taken. The first body is the Programming Group, which was set up in January 2003 to deal with the programmatic aspects of the decisions and their interaction. The priority issues it has dealt with to date include the transition to an electronic documentation work flow or "e-flow", with the consequent adjustment of the existing documentation work flow; the processing of resolutions, in particular their concordance before adoption by the General Assembly; and enhanced coordination to reduce overtime expenditures. The second body is the Information and Communication Technology

Committee (ICTC), which was set up in December 2001 to coordinate technological development. Since 2002, it has conducted a detailed review of the technological requirements of the Department, and has prioritized projects and related procurement against available resources. It has also established the priorities and resource requirements of the Department for the period 2004-2005 in preparing the proposed programme budget for that biennium. The two bodies have been working in tandem and drawing on each other's expertise: the Programming Group refers the technological aspects of the issues before it to ICTC, and receives requests from ICTC for programmatic evaluation and possible operational changes in working procedures.

12. At the same time, the Department has made use of a variety of forums, such as regular Chiefs' meetings, town hall meetings and staff meetings of individual work units, to ensure smooth communication among, and greater participation by, staff and managers at all levels.

B. Intradepartmental measures

13. The implementation plan outlines the redesigning and integration of work processes. Thus, the Department has identified areas to be strengthened, measures to be adopted and technologies to be employed, taking into full account the specific concerns of various units but always bearing in mind the need for improving the overall performance of the Department.

14. Most notable among the measures taken by the Department are the enhancement of coordination, the optimization of work flow, the internal redeployment of resources and organizational restructuring. For example:

- Constant interaction between technical secretariat support and conference management is strongly encouraged on all matters, ranging from the scheduling of meetings and the availability of documentation to the editing of draft resolutions, so that the two main activities of the Department can better complement each other.

- By integrating conference officers, distribution staff and interpreters under one Division, the requests of delegates in meeting rooms can be made known immediately to all concerned and the response is faster and more coherent.

- The most drastic step has been taken in the documents-processing chain, where the adjustment of the sequence of processing will ensure that documents are well referenced and well edited when they reach translators. Translators will then use a variety of electronic tools in their work so that the need for text-processing will decline. The electronic documents transmission system or "e-Conveyor" will be in place to transmit documents electronically down the processing line, at the end of which is the "printing on demand" system, which uses electronic input for customized printing and distribution.

15. All these measures necessitate the redeployment of resources, for example from official records editing, text-processing and distribution to editorial control and translation, meeting servicing and the information technology area. In a number of cases, changes have also been made in the organizational structure of the Department, and almost all of the streamlining proposed in annex II of the report of the Secretary-General on improving the performance of the Department (A/57/285)

has already taken place. The purpose is to shift resources from areas where they produce only marginal value to areas where they can yield higher value or impact from a full-system perspective, so that departmental performance can be optimized within existing resources. As a result of all the measures taken, intradepartmental coordination has been substantially improved.

C. Interdepartmental and intergovernmental measures

16. A chronic problem plaguing the Department is the crisis management mode of operations it has to resort to on an almost daily basis in response to competing requests for its services. Reform within the Department is only part of the answer. Closer interdepartmental and intergovernmental coordination is critical. In response to the new proactive approach of the Department and its strict enforcement of the relevant policies, the following encouraging trends have emerged:

- More documents are being submitted to the Department on time and within the required page limits as a result of a change in the mentality of the other Secretariat entities that had previously not paid adequate attention to the operational and budgetary constraints of the Department;
- Meeting schedules are being respected and resources are thus being better utilized due to a change in the mentality of various intergovernmental bodies that had previously been accustomed to requesting or cancelling services at will, without any appreciation for the consequences of such actions or their impact on other bodies.

IV. Integrating global management

17. While the reform of conference management operations started in New York, the Department has involved the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi ever since the reform was first conceptualized. Indeed, an important objective of the reform is to achieve the integrated management of conference-related resources. At this stage, integrated management has been realized mainly through the harmonization of policies and the standardization of practices in operational, financial and personnel matters across duty stations.

18. Thus, at the annual Coordination Meeting of Conference Managers of the four main duty stations and the regional commissions, which was held in Geneva from 7 to 9 July 2003, managers were encouraged to "think globally" in examining the five major areas in which concerted efforts must be made, at both the policy and operational levels, in conformity with the new proactive approach to conference management that stresses full-system benefits. Those areas are: meetings management; documents management; financial and budgetary methodologies; performance measurement; and information technology.

19. The calendar of conferences and meetings approved by the General Assembly is the most important and authoritative tool for the management of meetings. The Department will work more proactively with the intergovernmental bodies concerned to create a refined calendar that can make the fullest and most rational use of available resources across duty stations, while avoiding simultaneous peaks, and to that end will engage in Secretariat-wide coordination of the servicing of all

meetings. The Department will make concerted efforts to advise intergovernmental bodies of the implications, in particular, the programme budget implications, of their requests for services, especially when those requests are concentrated during the same period of time and thus create simultaneous peaks. And it is developing an electronic meetings management system (see paras. 26 and 27 below) as a planning database accessible to all duty stations that will facilitate the sharing of meeting information at the earliest stage and the sharing of the workload among duty stations. Naturally, this integrated approach must allow for the specific conditions of various duty stations, such as the United Nations Offices at Vienna and Nairobi, which rely on extrabudgetary revenues.

20. In the area of documents management, since the proactive approach adopted in New York towards upstream planning and downstream processing, together with a firmer enforcement of established rules and guidelines, have begun to yield positive results, the Department will extend proven managerial and operational policies applied at Headquarters, including the slotting system, to the other duty stations.

21. The experience of the Department in preparing the proposed programme budget for 2004-2005 underscores the importance of consistency and coherence among duty stations, both in terms of financial and budgetary methodologies and formulas and in terms of performance measurement methods and indicators. Analysis of best practices and lessons learned will be conducted, and the results will be duly reflected in future planning and budget preparations.

22. Closer coordination in the area of technological development is a constant theme of integrated management. An IT expert group of the Coordination Meeting has thus been established, under the chairmanship of the Department's representative on the Information and Communications Technology Board and composed of technical experts of the four main duty stations and the regional commissions. To make the most of the finite resources and reduce the opportunity costs of non-concerted development, the expert group will focus on (a) sharing information in a timely and systematic manner, and (b) ensuring that projects are compatible within and across duty stations and conform with Secretariat-wide policies and standards. It will also promote the standardization of applications and integration of systems so as to reduce project development and execution costs, including training and procurement costs, and to facilitate workload-sharing in the medium term. Admittedly, the integration of existing electronic tools that were developed and customized to meet the specificities of individual duty stations should be based on clearly identified benefits.

23. In the light of the above, the Department has launched a comprehensive study on the fundamentals of integrated global management, in cooperation with OIOS. The study will ascertain the scope of integrated global management, in line with successive legislative and administrative mandates; devise a practical approach that is based on a broad consensus among the concerned duty stations of what is desirable and practicable, paying full attention to the appropriate operational, financial and personnel authority and accountability requirements; and revise the relevant administrative documents to reflect new developments in this respect.

V. Optimizing the use of technology

24. Information technology has always been a strategic asset of the Department. The new philosophy and modus operandi of the Department call for expanded application of information technology in a coordinated manner. In this regard, the Information and Communication Technology Committee has played a pivotal role by creating an enabling environment for reform. Set up to coordinate the heretofore scattered and unsystematic information technology (IT) development, it has the following mandates: establish a departmental IT strategy aligned with the programmatic goals of the Department, especially in the process of reform; prioritize and follow up projects in the light of the need for compatibility and tangible results, as well as the availability of resources; provide guidance to the IT expert group currently operating under the Coordination Meeting, and cooperate with the Information and Communications Technology Board to ensure that departmental IT development is in line with the overall IT strategy and standards of the Secretariat.

25. Since the current information technology infrastructure of the Department is oriented towards a mostly paper-based work flow in both documentation processing and meeting scheduling, the thrust of the departmental strategy, as approved by the Departmental Management Group, is to introduce new technology and optimize its use both in the meetings chain and throughout the documents chain.

A. Electronic meetings management

26. The meetings management system, or "e-Meets", has been designed as a management tool for all units of the Department involved in the scheduling and servicing of meetings and other events at Headquarters. It is also a central electronic repository of meeting-related information, for the use of both Secretariat units and Member States. As such, it has generated and distributed weekly and daily meeting reports for all servicing units and has managed all meeting room reservations.

27. The first phase of the project was successfully tested and completed in 2003. Its most visible result has been the scrolling list of meeting information displayed on monitors in the Secretariat and Conference Buildings, which provides up-to-date information on scheduled meetings or ongoing meetings of the day. In future, the installation of electronic information panels to provide general and meeting-specific information will be fully considered, in collaboration with other departments concerned in the context of the capital master plan.

B. Electronic documents management

28. The documents-processing chain covers documents from their submission through their processing and printing to their distribution, and is tracked by the Electronic Document Registration and Information Tracking System (e-DRITS). However, since tracking information alone has been found to be inadequate, a fully electronic flow of documents has been initiated to integrate e-DRITS and all the IT projects involved in the entire chain.

1. Electronic submission of documents

29. A prerequisite for the electronic flow of documents is the submission of material in electronic format. At present, all documents prepared by author entities of the Secretariat are required to be submitted in both electronic and paper format, which are then forwarded to downstream processing units. Upon the successful completion of a fully electronic flow of documents, an editorial directive will be issued requiring all Secretariat entities to submit documents in electronic format only. In addition, since documents submitted by Member States and/or intergovernmental bodies constitute an important share of the overall documents-processing workload of the Department, the Department is also considering operational schemes to facilitate the electronic submission of such documents or their conversion into electronic format.

2. Electronic flow of documents

30. The centrepiece of the electronic flow of documents as currently envisaged will take place in two stages. First, e-flow will support the electronic transmission of documents, as well as related reference material and terminology in all official languages, through every stage of the documents-processing chain, so as to reduce the time required to move documents down the processing line and, in some instances, to reduce workload downstream. The e-Conveyor system has been designed and tested for the e-flow and is expected to be in trial operation by the end of 2003. Consequently, every effort has been made to provide staff with basic computer skills and necessary support tools. All translators and revisers are required to learn keyboarding skills; voice recognition is being offered for faster output speed; a digital dictation recording system will facilitate dictating and sending high-quality voice files electronically for downstream transcription; and computer-assisted translation will contribute to a more consistent output for certain recurrent documents of a repetitive nature. Other support tools include an electronic referencing system or "e-Folder", which collects and delivers electronic reference material and terminology; the LEO database server, which provides quick access to a complete local electronic archive system for the most recent parliamentary documents in all United Nations official languages; the retrieval software "dtSearch", which provides a one-stop full-text search of all documents archived in LEO or locally shared file servers; and in-house web sites that serve as information clearing houses or bulletin boards for quick access to all the latest information on translation-related material.

31. Second, the full benefits of an electronic work flow will materialize only with the electronic processing of documents in all official languages. However, that will require a much higher level of technological readiness on the part of the staff, in addition to more sophisticated technologies, and will have to be carefully planned, prepared and phased in over a period of time. To that end, the Department has issued operational guidelines that make computer skills a necessary requirement for all newly recruited staff involved in the documents chain, and has developed a detailed training plan for permanent staff members.

3. Printing on demand

32. To maximize the impact of the electronic work flow, printing-on-demand technology is being gradually introduced as part of the modernization plan of the

publishing and distribution infrastructure. Using electronic input from upstream processing units, the technology permits customized print runs according to varying demands. It can also greatly facilitate distribution through batch printing and automated sorting for individual end-users, according to their specific requirements. For initial distribution, the first batch of printing-on-demand equipment will be installed in time for the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly, and a technical evaluation of the hardware and software requirements of the full-fledged printing-on-demand system will be conducted in the second half of 2003. Meanwhile, secondary distribution has already made use of printing-on-demand technology to provide expeditious or even on-the-spot printing of requested documents to satisfy the urgent needs of delegates or Secretariat officials who no longer receive printed copies of documents at Headquarters.

33. In view of the limitations of the existing printing-on-demand technology, the Department has been working towards the proper mix of traditional and modern technology that would respond to the varying needs in the most cost-effective manner. It is believed that with the advance of technology, the consequent reduction in costs and the expected savings in staff, time and storage, the technology will be applied on an increasingly wider scale.

4. Electronic availability of documents

34. A new version of the *Journal of the United Nations* was launched in September 2002, offering greater readability and more information, including information on non-official events at Headquarters. Most importantly, to provide Member States and Secretariat staff with convenient and efficient access to documents, the *Journal* currently has an electronic version posted on the web site of the United Nations that offers real-time worldwide electronic access to all language versions of hyperlinked documents, including the daily list of documents issued at Headquarters. All requests for hard copies by delegations will continue to be met since the reliance on the electronic version of documents is uneven among individual users. It is believed, however, that over time and with the development of technology — particularly wireless technology in conference rooms that provides users with online access to documents — paper-based document requirements will continue to decline. Accordingly, a note verbale dated 2 May 2003 was sent to Member and Observer States, urging them to review their hard-copy requirements. The Department has also announced its intention to eliminate secondary distribution of hard copies to depository libraries, except in cases where a given library lacks the infrastructure to take advantage of the availability of online documentation. The *Journal* will be further developed to provide access to archived data and search functions.

VI. Alleviating the documentation situation

35. The new environment created by the reform has made it possible for the Department to take a number of managerial decisions to establish a sound work flow and mitigate the perpetual crisis mode of operations that is most prevalent in the documents chain.

A. Slotting system

36. The late issuance of documents, a perennial concern of the Member States, is often caused by the late and often uncoordinated submission of documents for processing. To address this problem, the Department started to implement a slotting system in 2003 on a trial basis, in close cooperation with author entities of the Secretariat and secretaries of intergovernmental bodies. Under this innovative forward-planning system, documents are assigned a week-long "slot" based on the scheduled dates of their consideration by intergovernmental bodies. Documents submitted within the slot will be issued at the latest four weeks before they are due for consideration. The implementation of the system was a major topic of the first coordination meeting for the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly convened by the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management on 10 February 2003. A submission schedule of pre-session documentation was subsequently established first for the substantive session of 2003 of the Economic and Social Council and subsequently for the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly. With the system already functioning, the processing units, which have been provided with a week-by-week workload forecast for the next six months, will be able to distribute their established resources against expected outputs and to schedule their temporary assistance and outsourcing requirements at an earlier stage. The system should also help to ease the crisis mode of operation, which compels the highly inefficient parallel processing of documents with tight deadlines.

37. An initial assessment shows a growing awareness on the part of author departments of the slotting system and the importance of staying within their assigned slot, which augurs well for a mechanism that is complicated and delicate in nature. Therefore, the Department is considering multiple approaches to expand its coverage. It has started to slot post-session documents in order to prevent any delays in their submission that might compound the processing of slotted and more deadline-sensitive pre-session documents. It will also work to improve the efficacy of the system through the forecast of in-session documents, including draft resolutions and decisions, as well as communications received from Member and Observer States.

38. The slotting system, as the upstream planning mechanism supported by e-DRITS, is an indispensable part of the documents management system. The slotting system and the electronic flow of documentation for downstream processing together hold the key to alleviating the documentation situation.

B. Length of reports

39. The Department has meticulously enforced restrictions and guidelines on the length of reports originating in and outside the Secretariat. Given the need for flexibility, an accountability procedure has been put in place whereby heads of author entities of the Secretariat are requested to submit waiver requests for specific documents to the Assistant Secretary-General of the Department, whenever they deem them warranted. This procedure has sensitized the heads of departments in general and the Secretariat in particular to the problem. As a result, in the first five months of 2003 over 90 per cent of reports originating in the Secretariat were submitted in accordance with the established page limit. For reports not originating in the Secretariat, such as reports of committees and special rapporteurs, the

Department has urged the drafters to adhere to the page guideline set by the General Assembly.

C. Summary records

40. In the course of its internal review, the Department found that summary records had always been prepared on time in the original language, and that the late issuance of summary records was attributable to its insufficient capacity to translate the original language version into the five other official languages in a timely manner. Moreover, the increasing number of meetings over the years had led to a commensurate increase in summary records requirements without any corresponding increase of resources.

41. In section III, paragraph 18, of its resolution 57/283 B, the Assembly requested consideration to be given to various measures, including enhanced cooperation between the production of press releases by the Department of Public Information and the preparation of summary records by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management. The two Departments held consultations in 2003 and concluded that press releases are prepared mainly with the interests of the media in mind and may sometimes omit information of importance to Member States and for the historical record. In addition, they cannot be drafted in a way that meets both media and Member States' interests, and therefore cannot be acceptable substitutes for summary records that constitute the authoritative account of meeting proceedings. In this connection, it may be recalled that several previous studies of proposals to replace customary summary records with an abbreviated version akin to press releases, notably studies conducted in 1979, 1983 and 1994, have drawn similar conclusions. It should also be noted that, because they are not official documents, press releases are not subject to the rule governing the simultaneous issuance of official documents in all six official languages and are often issued in one language only.

42. To ameliorate the situation, a study on the potential of low-cost searchable digital recordings of the proceedings of meetings was proposed in the report of the Secretary-General on improving the performance of the Department (A/57/289). An added benefit of such technology is that recordings could be extended to forums that are not currently entitled to summary records at a negligible cost. The proposal, however, was not approved by the Assembly at its fifty-seventh session. Consequently, to ensure the timely issuance of summary records in all official languages, the Assembly may wish to consider either strengthening the staffing of the six Translation Services or providing additional resources to outsource the activity. Alternatively, it may wish to conduct a thorough cost-benefit analysis of the current approach to summary records and review the list of bodies entitled to such records.

D. Concordance of draft resolutions of the General Assembly

43. Concordance is performed to ensure consistency among all language versions of a draft resolution. Consequently, it ought to be completed prior to formal action by the General Assembly, ideally even before action by the Main Committees, since all language versions of a legislative text are thereafter equally authentic. This,

however, has been made impossible by the back-loaded working methods of some of the bodies concerned. As a result, the Department has traditionally been conducting concordance of resolutions after their adoption by the General Assembly, which may well be regarded as an act exceeding its terms of reference.

44. With a view to completing the concordance of draft resolutions prior to their adoption by the General Assembly, a pilot project was carried out during the fifty-seventh session, focusing on draft resolutions recommended by the First Committee but not yet adopted in plenary. The pilot brought to light a number of operational constraints that would have to be addressed, inter alia, by redesigning the work process of the Official Records Editing Section and the Editorial and Translation Services within the Department. It underscored the importance of heightened cooperation between intergovernmental bodies and their secretaries, on the one hand, and the relevant language services of the Department on the other. A second pilot project will be conducted during the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly, covering not just the First Committee but the Fourth and Sixth Committees as well. Whether it will be practicable to extend this arrangement to all draft resolutions will depend largely on changes and adjustments to the working methods and programmes of work of the plenary and the other Main Committees of the General Assembly.

VII. Ensuring high-quality performance in the course of reform

45. Although the Department has introduced many changes in the course of reform, one thing that will remain unchanged is its commitment to continued high-quality performance. For this purpose, it has taken a combination of measures in various fields.

A. Quality

46. Improvement of quality has been a constant theme running through the work of the Department ever since its establishment. The ongoing reform has made it not only necessary but also possible to:

(a) Minimize highly disruptive crisis situations or undesirable processing procedures, such as overnight processing; optimize the work flow to avoid duplication of work and confusion; strengthen coordination among technical secretariat and language staff in handling sensitive documents; develop IT tools; and provide more training opportunities for the staff;

(b) Encourage a stronger sense of accountability on the part of individual staff members and managers;

(c) Ensure that quality control and lessons-learned mechanisms not only exist but work effectively, so that similar mistakes will not recur and complaints about quality will be handled in the most expeditious manner;

(d) Step up coordination with the other duty stations so as to harmonize policies and practices and share workload; enhance cooperation with other Secretariat entities by, inter alia, providing editorial assistance; and engage in exchanges with the Member States to address their particular concerns.

B. Workload standards

47. In view of the inadequacy of the current workload standards for language staff, the Department has set up a task force to conduct a comprehensive study covering all major language-related functions, including interpretation and translation. In the course of the study, the Department will consult with and lead a consultative review involving the other duty stations and the other members of the Inter-Agency Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications. It believes, however, that such a review must take into account the impact of the current re-engineering of work processes, especially the transition to an electronic work flow through the application of new technologies. It is anticipated that the study will be launched by the end of 2003 with a view to reporting to the General Assembly at its fifty-ninth session.

C. Performance measurement

48. Realizing the drawbacks of the traditional method of measuring the performance of its operations by merely quantitative means, the Department has adopted a client-oriented approach by conducting surveys. In 2003, the Commission on Sustainable Development, the Fifth Committee, the plenary of the General Assembly and the Committee for Programme and Coordination were surveyed. The surveys testify to a high degree of satisfaction with the performance of the Department but have also brought to light the need for improvement in certain areas. Surveys of intergovernmental bodies will be conducted on a regular basis in future as part of the performance measurement mechanism of the Department. Meanwhile, the Department has been coordinating with various duty stations to develop other effective methods of performance measurement. Performance measurement will be included as an important subject in the comprehensive study of workload standards mentioned in paragraph 47 above.

D. Terminology

49. In response to the specific concern of Member States, a series of language-specific consultations were organized by the Department in May 2003 to facilitate discussions between its language services and interested delegations on the terminology used at, and often developed by, the United Nations. Conducted for the second time in as many years, such periodic interaction between the Secretariat and Member States has helped address linguistic questions that delegations have had and have served as a useful mechanism for the language staff to become more familiar with national sources of terminology information.

50. A significant development in the area of terminology occurred in the autumn of 2002, when the online multilingual United Nations Terminology Database (UNTERM) was made accessible to all duty stations and the general public via the Internet. Developed over more than three decades by the language services of the Secretariat, UNTERM contains over 65,000 entries, most of which are United Nations-related terms, and is continually updated and expanded. It will greatly facilitate the consistent use of terminology among all language services within and across duty stations and will contribute to a higher quality of output.

VIII. Conclusions

51. The first year of the reform has laid a solid foundation for fundamentally changing the existing philosophy and mentality and overhauling the modus operandi of the Department. A number of significant steps have been taken and some tangible results have been achieved, as illustrated above. The cumulative effect of these changes is reflected in the Department's sound budgetary position. For example, as compared with the biennia 1998-1999 and 2000-2001, when the expenditures incurred by the Department in New York exceeded its initial appropriations by 11 million and 27.6 million United States dollars, respectively, the reform effort has led to considerable reductions in temporary assistance and overtime expenditures, thus enabling the Department in New York to stay within its budget allotment for 2002 and to be in a good position to discharge all its functions within the 2002-2003 budgetary appropriations.

52. Building on the actions undertaken to date, follow-up steps include:

- The electronic transmission of documents has made steady progress and will be in trial operation by the end of 2003. Preparations will be under way for achieving the final goal, namely, the fully electronic processing of documents in all official languages, which is a much longer-term process.
- Initially, printing on demand will be introduced for the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly. Serious efforts will be made to replace outdated traditional equipment and to identify the most appropriate mix of technology for its full-scale application, covering both printing and distribution.
- Following a second trial run of the concordance of selected draft resolutions during the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly, consideration will be given to extending the practice to all General Assembly resolutions.
- E-Meets will be upgraded so that delegations can use it for informational and service-request purposes. It will also be expanded to include information from other duty stations, so that the preparation of the calendar of conferences and meetings can be based on the most rational utilization of available resources.
- The electronic management systems for the meetings chain and the documents chain will be increasingly integrated with each other to synchronize documentation requirements with meeting schedules.
- Since the reform that was initiated by the Department in New York has also gradually been implemented at the United Nations Offices at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi, a major study of the integrated global management of conference-related resources will be conducted, in cooperation with the Office of Internal Oversight Services.
- The Department will undertake a comprehensive study of workload standards and performance measurement.

53. Reform is a gradual process. It takes time for a new philosophy to take hold, a new mentality to take root and new practices to take over. Reform is also a process of trial and error. Although the initial results are promising, complications

have emerged and adjustments have been and will continue to be made. The final success of the reform will require persistent and well-coordinated efforts of the Department in the coming years. It will also depend, to a considerable extent, on support from the other Secretariat units and the intergovernmental bodies.